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Wright, Robert Clinton

Confidence

[Baltimore]

[1916]

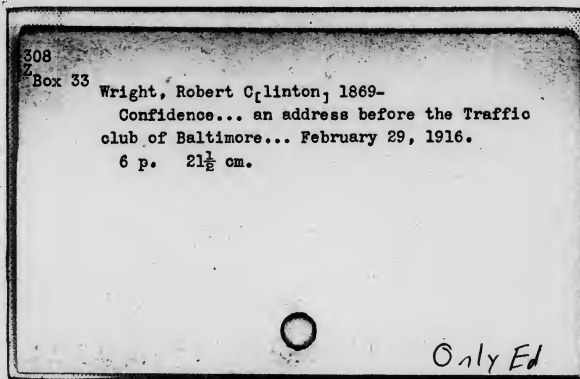
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Mr. Robert C. Wright, Freight Traffic
Manager of the Pennsylvania Railroad,
in an address before the Traffic Club of
Baltimore on "Confidence"—February
29, 1916.

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"SOME time ago the Pennsylvania Railroad displayed on bulletin boards all over its System large posters asking the people to give the Management the benefit of their advice. The responses to that bulletin were very interesting. A great many, of course, dealt with some personal grievance, but for the most part they showed a most helpful spirit on the part of the public. The railroad issued that poster in all seriousness, and it was met in the same vein. This shows the public is tolerant if it understands.

* * * *

"We want the people along our lines to know that the Pennsylvania Railroad is doing everything it can to give the best service possible and to encourage the business of the territory through which we operate, and of the country at large. We want all the advice and assistance we can get from our people. We want the public to understand, and to believe in, the Management of this Railroad. We think they will, because the Management of the Pennsylvania Railroad believes in the public.

"The thing that is needed in our business life, and which I might say has been lacking the last few years, and the thing which is particularly necessary in the relations between the carriers and the public, is confidence.

"The railroad companies have been urged to take the public into their confidence, but

they can't take the public into their confidence until the public has confidence in them. I have tried it and I know.

"You tell a man your cards are all on the table and try to take him into your confidence, but unless he has confidence in you he suspects that there are some aces up your sleeve.

* * * *

"The first step in mutual confidence between the carriers and the public is to restore the public's confidence in the carriers. I realize perfectly that the public's lack of confidence in the railroads has been more or less justified in the past, due to the practices of the carriers, but let by-gones be by-gones. We must look ahead, not behind. It is unfair to refer continually to the abuses of times gone past, in an effort to keep alive hostility toward the railroads.

"There is still too much of an effort to make personal capital out of throwing rocks at a railroad; it is a cheap amusement, and often it wins the plaudits of the multitude, but is it fair? Is it conducive to the restoration of mutual confidence, which I believe is so necessary in solving the railroad problem?

"Our railroad company must have rules and regulations, which we try to make as fair and reasonable as we can to the greatest number; these rules and regulations will always, in instances, bear hard on some particular situation, and may seem unjust and unreasonable, but

under the law these rules and regulations must be non-discriminatory and must apply to everyone alike.

* * * *

"We are sitting up nights, trying to frame all our rules to be fair to everyone. We want to run the railroad so as to make the greatest number of friends and the smallest number of enemies.

"We are now in the midst of a very trying freight congestion, necessitating placing embargos today and lifting them tomorrow. Many people probably think us mean and arbitrary, sometimes, in placing these restrictions, but they wouldn't if they knew how we are working to protect the interest of the shippers, especially those local to our own lines. Our purpose is a selfish one, I admit. We want to make friends of our patrons. That means more patrons and more money.

* * * *

"I sometimes wonder if people realize how a railroad such as ours is being ground continually between the upper and nether millstones. Baltimore wants something and tells us what great things we are doing for Philadelphia and New York. Philadelphia wants something and her papers chide us about favoring Baltimore and New York. Pittsburgh wants something and we are reminded how we favor Buffalo, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York. Chi-

cago wants something and we are berated because they say we discriminate against her in favor of Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York. And so it goes. You can imagine how perplexed the Management must get now and then. Personally, I would like to meet the railroad officer who could please all communities, and I would like to work for the railroad that had the means to do it.

* * * *

"Let us have confidence in each other. If we don't understand the other's viewpoint, let us talk it over, and if we still cannot reach the same conclusion, let us then submit it with no feeling to the proper Commission or Court, in order that a settlement may be reached.

"Then, let's be good sports and stand by the decision and not keep on complaining that the other fellow won't do what we want. Above all, let's believe that each wants to be fair.

"Let us give each other a chance to show why he thinks he is fair and retain through any difference of opinion confidence in each other, which will make for a furtherance of the mutual help of business men and railroads, which goes to make the prosperity of the nation."

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